

**STATEMENT OF
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SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION**

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING AND URBAN
DEVELOPMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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Chairman Olver and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the U.S. Department of Transportation's (DOT) activities in support of livable communities, transit-oriented development, and green building practices.

Let me say at the outset that fostering livable communities is a key aspect of President Obama's urban policy agenda and Vice President Biden's Middle Class initiative. How a community is designed – including the layout of its roads, transit systems and walkways – has a huge impact on its residents. For instance, nearly one-third of Americans live in neighborhoods without sidewalks and almost one-half of households say they lack access to public transportation. Improving the livability of our Nation's communities will help raise living standards.

My primary goal at the Department is effective implementation of President Obama's national priorities for transportation. In doing this, I intend to work closely with Congress, other Federal Departments and agencies, the Nation's Governors, and local elected officials. As I see it, this will require a strong focus in at least four areas:

- the economy;
- a sustainable transportation system and related development;
- a strong focus on people and the communities where they work and live; and
- safety on the road, on the rails, in the air, and on the water.

WHY LIVABILITY IS IMPORTANT

A new focus on livability can help transform the way transportation serves the American people and the contribution it makes to the quality of life in our communities. Transportation can play an enhanced role in creating safer, healthier communities with the strong economies needed to support our families. As the population increases, we must identify new strategies to move people and goods within communities and throughout the Nation. Integrating transportation planning with community development and expanding

transportation options will not only improve connectivity and influence how people choose to travel, but also enable communities to consider the design of transportation and land use together.

Mixed-use neighborhoods with highly-connected streets arranged in small blocks promote mobility for all users, whether they are walking, bicycling, riding transit or driving motor vehicles. Benefits include improved traffic flow, shorter trip lengths, reduced vehicle-miles traveled, safer streets for pedestrians and cyclists, lower per-capita greenhouse gas emissions, reduced dependence on fossil fuels, increased trip-chaining, and independence for those who prefer not to or are unable to drive. In addition, investment in street networks stimulates private-sector economic activity, increases the viability of street-level retail businesses and professional services, creates housing opportunities, and extends the usefulness of school and transit facilities.

Mixed-use, compact development can result in an increase in walking and biking to destinations of short distances. Currently, American adults travel 25 million miles a day in trips of a half-mile or less, of which nearly 60 percent are vehicle trips. A 2005 Seattle study found that residents traveled 26 percent fewer vehicle miles in neighborhoods where land uses were mixed and streets were better connected. In these areas, non-auto travel was also easier than in neighborhoods that were more dispersed and less connected. If a large share of the traveling public could walk or bike for short trips, it is estimated that the Nation could save over one million gallons of gas and millions of dollars in motor fuel costs per day. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has extensively studied the benefits of physical activity like walking and biking, so there is another policy incentive to linking transportation and land use policies: improving the health of Americans and lowering medical costs.

Livability incorporates the concept of collaborative decision-making. By involving the public in the planning process and coordinating transportation activities with other activities related to healthy, sustainable communities, we improve the quality of life for all Americans. Collaborative, interdisciplinary decisions get good results: improved organizational effectiveness, the creation of social capital, stronger environmental management, as well as reduced costs and time to complete transportation projects. In addition, we should encourage flexibility and creativity to shape effective transportation solutions, while preserving and enhancing community and natural environments.

Automobile congestion impacts our communities and quality of life. According to the 2007 Urban Mobility report prepared by the Texas Transportation Institute, traffic congestion continues to worsen in American cities of all sizes, creating a nearly \$80 billion annual drain on the U.S. economy in the form of 4.2 billion lost hours resulting from travel delay and 2.9 billion gallons of wasted fuel. The 2007 mobility report notes that congestion caused the average peak-period traveler to spend an extra 38 hours of travel time and consume an additional 26 gallons of fuel annually, amounting to a cost of \$710 per traveler. Although recent data suggest that travel, as measured by vehicle-miles traveled, has been less in recent months, we nevertheless need to give that time and money back to our economy and our citizens. Ways to greatly improve the efficiency of the entire transportation network include better transit services; increased ridesharing; variable road pricing and other demand

management strategies; and managing our road and transit systems better through Intelligent Transportation Systems, and other traffic flow improvements. Other options include integrated transportation, and land use and housing planning policies that encourage mixed-use, compact developments that reduce the need for motor vehicle trips and support more transportation options to reduce trip distances and time.

Implementing strategies that incorporate the principles of livability will result in improved quality of life for all Americans and create a more efficient and more accessible transportation network that services the needs of individual communities. Fostering the concept of livability in transportation projects and programs will help America's neighborhoods become safer, healthier and more vibrant.

DOT'S LIVABILITY INITIATIVE

I am committed to improving the livability of our Nation's communities and, in fact, shortly after I was confirmed as Secretary of Transportation, I charged the Department's Policy Office with developing a DOT-wide Livability Initiative. I am pleased to note that DOT already has numerous programs that foster livability -- everything from promoting transit-oriented development, to fostering bicycle and pedestrian programs, ensuring safety, protecting and enhancing the human and natural environment, designing our transportation projects to understand and respect their context and the communities they serve, supporting Indian Reservation Roads and transit that connect tribal residents to needed services, including schools and hospitals, congestion mitigation and traffic management, and initiatives to reduce energy consumption and transportation-related environmental impacts on our communities, including highway and aviation noise.

However, further actions would enhance transportation's contribution to strong and connected communities. First, the range of transportation choices available to all Americans -- including transit, walking, bicycling, and improved connectivity for various modes -- must be expanded. American businesses must also have effective transportation to meet their logistical needs so that they can continue to provide jobs for their surrounding communities. All segments of the population must have access to safe transportation services to get to work, housing, medical services, schools, shopping, recreation, and other essential activities. Just as important, our transportation investment decisions need to be consistent with our policies concerning greenhouse gas emissions. And efforts must be renewed to reduce other adverse effects of transportation on all aspects of the natural and human environment.

Although we are still developing the details, my goal through DOT's Livability Initiative is to enhance the economic and social well-being of all Americans by creating and maintaining a safe, reliable, intermodal and accessible transportation network that enhances choices for transportation users, provides easy access to employment opportunities and other destinations, and promotes positive effects on the surrounding community. The Initiative will need to build on innovative ways of doing business that promote mobility and enhance the unique characteristics of our neighborhoods, communities and regions. Under the Livability Initiative, my intent is to enable communities to:

- better integrate transportation and land use planning to inform decision-making about public investments;
- foster multimodal transportation systems and effective multimodal connections;
- provide more safe transportation options to improve access to housing, jobs, health care, businesses, recreation, public services and social activities;
- increase public participation in designing communities and coordinating transportation and housing;
- improve public health by reducing noise and air pollution emissions;
- enhance planning for the unique transportation needs of individual communities; and
- better accommodate the needs of our ever-increasing older population as they give up driving.

IMPORTANCE OF FEDERAL TRANSPORTATION INVESTMENT TO LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

Transportation is the second highest cost for American families behind housing. Reducing the need for motor vehicle trips and providing access to transportation choices can address this cost and lower the average household expenditure on transportation.

Federal investments in transportation systems and infrastructure, including aviation, highways, rail, bus, ferries, and other public transportation, have been vitally important to the Nation's fastest-growing metropolitan areas, small- and mid-sized cities, and in rural areas. These systems create links between home, school, work, recreation areas, and other important destinations. Since 1984, the number of cities with publicly funded passenger rail service has more than doubled. A decade ago, two out of every five residents in rural and small urban communities did not have access to public transportation. Since then, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has been instrumental in bringing new public transportation options to dozens of these communities. Tribal areas also benefit from FTA investments that afford greater accessibility and mobility options.

Federal transportation investment has increased mobility and accessibility throughout the country. Businesses benefit from easier access to suppliers, a larger labor pool, and expanded consumer markets. These factors can reduce transportation costs both for business-related passenger travel and for the movement of commercial freight. Access to larger numbers of workers, consumers, and suppliers also provides greater choice, fosters specialization, and creates efficiencies.

Changes in demographics, shifts in land use patterns, and the emergence of new job markets require different approaches to managing mobility, particularly for people who may not be able to use existing transportation services due to age, disability, location, or other factors. Federal funding for public transportation has provided a framework around which eight Federal departments are collaborating to deliver community-based transportation services under various authorities. These services, which may be operated by private non-profit groups and community organizations, offer a lifeline to persons with disabilities, older Americans, and individuals and families who do not possess automobiles.

Transit-oriented, mixed-use development has the potential to provide an efficient and convenient option for employers, developers, young professionals and families in many large and small cities around the United States. Transit-oriented development also has the potential to contribute significantly to the revitalization of downtown districts, foster walkable neighborhoods, and offer an alternative to urban and suburban sprawl and automobile-focused commuting.

LINKAGE BETWEEN TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING AND LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

Clearly the linkage between public transportation and urban development is crucial, particularly when it comes to low-income housing. Over the past five years, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and FTA have explored opportunities to coordinate housing and transportation planning and investment decision-making. A June 2003 roundtable hosted by the National Academy of Sciences focused on possible data sharing and development of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) by the two agencies.

Following the roundtable, HUD and FTA entered into a June 2005 Interagency Agreement (IAA) to help communities realize the potential demand for transit-oriented housing. The IAA was aimed at closing the gap between the projected demand for housing near transit in particular metropolitan regions, and realizing the development of that housing in proximity to new or existing transit corridors in these regions.

The IAA provided support for a jointly funded research study on *Realizing the Potential: Expanding Housing Opportunities Near Transit*. The report, published in April 2007 by the Center for Transit Oriented Development, included five case studies examining the role of public transportation in the location of affordable housing in Boston, Charlotte, Denver, Minneapolis-St. Paul, and Portland, Oregon. More recently, FTA and HUD released a report to Congress in September 2008 on *Better Coordination of Transportation and Housing Programs*. This report outlines strategies to continue and expand coordination in the areas of mixed-income and affordable housing choices near transit. In addition, FTA and HUD have been working as partners to continue development of coordinated, integrated strategies, methods and policies to promote the role of public transportation in affordable housing. Finally, FTA is developing a *Best Practices Manual* -- a multi-scenario "how-to" manual -- for promoting development of mixed-income housing near transit. This manual will be published by December 2009.

Our cooperative efforts do not end there. FTA and HUD have planned:

- quarterly meetings to coordinate interagency activities;
- joint outreach and capacity building with stakeholders;
- roundtable discussions with experts to identify barriers to investing in housing near transit;
- appropriate tools to support location efficiencies including GIS applications, financing tools, and performance-based indices; and

- programs to promote livability through transit-oriented development and joint housing/transit-oriented development.

DOT has also initiated a Federal Interagency Working Group on Transportation, Land Use, and Climate Change in which HUD is participating. The goal of the working group is to identify opportunities to better align Federal programs and resources to achieve greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions through land use solutions. The 13-agency working group has identified several areas where the Federal Government can begin to align efforts to address GHG, and is currently developing performance metrics, research and data needs for those areas. The results of this work will greatly benefit DOT's livability efforts.

REAUTHORIZATION OF SURFACE TRANSPORTATION PROGRAMS

The current authorization for Federal surface transportation programs – the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Surface Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) expires at the end of Fiscal Year (FY) 2009. The timing is such that we have a window of opportunity to think differently about livability and propose bold, new approaches to improve the livability of our Nation's communities as part of reauthorization.

Whatever legislative approach is pursued, we will be taking a hard look at potential changes to the livability criteria in metropolitan and statewide planning processes to ensure that they provide communities the flexibility they need to improve livability.

For example, we certainly think the debate should consider whether to:

- provide the necessary authority and funding to regions and communities to carry out livability goals in partnership with states;
- improve the consideration of land use, energy, the environment, and other livability elements in planning; and
- establish performance-based planning to focus on criteria and outcomes such as livability.

The Administration's surface transportation reauthorization proposal is still under development, and I look forward to discussing all the options for making livability a real centerpiece of the final proposal.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to working with the Congress, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the transportation community to expand livability within our communities, including the connections between housing and transportation.

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